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SOME THOUGHTS ON INDUSTRIAL UNREST ¹

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Chiefly because of the advancing cost of living, but largely at the same time on account of the ever growing inequality in the division of the wealth of the nation, there has been for many years a steady increase of discontent among the laboring people of the United States. This discontent is bound to keep on growing unless radical steps are taken to alleviate the present condition of the laboring classes. A great many things have been done during the past few years to benefit the laboring man but more must be done, and more will be done, because employers of labor and managers of business are commencing to realize to a greater extent than ever before the nature of their obligations toward their toiling employees. Just as the business man of today no longer believes that in order to get on in business he must roll his competitor in the dust, so no longer does he follow the practice of grinding his laborers down, paying them the lowest wages possible and utilizing them for his own interests and nothing beyond that.

Whatever may be the temporary expedients adopted to tide over present difficulties with which the laboring population is confronted, the ultimate solution of the entire labor problem must come through governmental action after careful and nonpartisan scientific study. Private philanthropy has done a great deal toward reducing industrial discontent. The people could not live that are not employed if it were not for the philanthropic work that is now being carried on. But no matter how much is done, enough is never done because the people themselves do not realize what the situation is and there are so many thousands of people who do not like to part with the money they have made, money which often they do not need and which is of no advantage to them. Furthermore, private philanthropy is confronted always by two great obstacles. It has a tendency to pauperize the people whom it is

¹This article is based on the author's testimony before the Industrial Relations Commission.

intended to benefit and it cannot reach many people who are deserving of help because of their aversion toward accepting charity. These obstacles can be surmounted only through state action. Unemployment, sickness, old age and similar problems of labor can be solved only through some system of social insurance managed and applied by state authority. If a man is out of employment it is the duty of the state through some agency to help him obtain work. If a man is physically unfit for labor either on account of injuries, sickness, or age, provision should be made by the state for his care.

Our industrial organization must be democratized. It must be transformed so that the laborer himself may have a voice in the determination of all the conditions by which his interests are affected, the length of his working hours, the amount of his wages, and the surroundings amid which he labors.

As indicated before, the attainment of industrial democracy must come in the main through scientific legislation. Through the action of the federal and state governments, employers and laborers must be brought together by a system of laws in the making of which all members of each class shall have an opportunity to participate. A great deal has been done in the way of legislation in this country but we are still years behind many foreign countries in providing for the welfare of workmen. Although many people are of the opinion that too much legislation is being enacted, I do not agree with that idea, nor do I think that we have begun to legislate to the extent that we shall in the future for the welfare of the workmen. I think the difference between the rich man and the poor man is very much too great, and it is only by taking steps to bridge the gulf that exists between them that we shall be able to get away from the unrest now prevailing among the working classes.

An important feature of the industrial democracy should be the establishment of a system through which the laborers may be permitted to share in the profits of industry. It should be provided, however, that the share due the laboring man may be given him in bulk at the end of a certain period and deposited in some bank or savings institution. The laborer usually does not know how to save and if he gets his money by the week he spends it; his expenses constantly keeping pace with his receipts. A few men learn how to save but it is a difficult matter for a poor man to learn.

Therefore, if he has an extra bonus at the end of a certain period, no matter how small it is, it should be deposited in bulk at some savings bank. As soon as a man has something of his own which he puts aside he feels differently, having acquired the pride of ownership and the knowledge of how to save. The cultivation of thrift will be of benefit not only to the individuals who save but to the people at large.

Industrial reforms can be brought about only by collective action and the first step toward securing the legislation necessary to the establishment of industrial democracy must be the organization of the workers who are to be benefited. The fact must not be overlooked that we have at the present time good organizations and bad organizations among laborers, just as we have "good trusts" and "bad trusts." The quality of leadership decides the quality of the organization. But good labor organizations, of which we have a great many in this country, can get together, analyze their difficulties and dispose of them. Such organizations deserve the fullest measure of coöperation from all employers, and it is through their united action that proper laws may be passed for the improvement of the economic condition of the people. We have already made a start in this country toward the establishment of industrial democracy through the enactment of laws regulating the hours of labor, laws fixing compensation for injuries, and laws regulating the conditions of employment. Progress in the future will be more rapid than in the past. With a proper organization of the forces of labor and capital and the cultivation of a mutual regard for the rights and obligations of both it will be possible to bring about any desirable change in our industrial system.